



THAT glowing skin; those high cheekbones; the browny blond hair; the sheer unspoilt beauty of it all: Budapest has a grand Riviera on the hilly, western Buda side, and cosmopolitan Pest - on the east bank - is uniformly grand. Plus, it's cheaper than most European cities and has an age of consent of fourteen for all persuasions.

Close to Szabadság Bridge and Gellért Bath, are gay venues like Action and Darling bar, gay-owned and operated KM Saga (Lonyai Street & Vámház Boulevard) guest house is situated in a lovely Art Nouveau building in the very heart of Pest, with rooms all antique-furnished.

There are several central gay friendly eateries. Pizzeria Club '93 (Vas ut. 2) bakes great value pizzas on Vas; Amstel River Cafe (Párisi ut. 6) on Párisi sprawls out onto the streets with Hungarian-Dutch fodder; but the real discovery for ambience and choice of interesting food is colourful Café Eklektika (Semmelweis ut. 21) on Semmelweis.

Gay bars are abundant in central Pest. Unfortunately, the previously thriving Café Limo now lies empty following a disastrously botched building job that weakened its walls. However, check out the small, two-level, dark and intense Darling Bar (Szép ut. 1) on nearby Szép - so tiny that man-on-man contact is highly probable, indeed hardly avoidable. There's a dark-room behind the bar and quite a few rent boys.

If music is your thing, then jive to Chaos (Dohány ut. 38) a modish basement bar and music parlour, ideal for chilling and chatting. There's a gallery and internet café upstairs, open daytime. Downstairs in the huge cellar is a large bricks-and-metal cruising lounge with small dance floor and a recently-opened back room. If you just want to cruise online to access all your hotmails, then try Mystery Bar (Nagysándor Jozsef ut. 3) strangely light and larger-than-life due to some whizzy tricks with mirrors!

But if you want to get into the thick of things, then head straight for Action Bar (Magyar ut. 42) a sprawling base-

ment labyrinth where naked boys write around polls and horny punters slip into the darkroom, or hang about in the half light of its shadowy entrance. And - purely gay on a Saturday night when there's also a backroom - Angyal Bar (Szövetség ut. 33) is the main dance club in town with three bars and a lower dance floor playing pop and dance to a drunken, mostly young crowd.

The two main nocturnal cruising grounds gaze impressively out onto the Danube. Pest has the 'hustly' grassy strip just north of Erzsébet Hid (Bridge) around the Marcius 15 té (Square). Note: this is pretty exclusively for horny, older businessmen out to rent-a-boy for a night back at the hotel between meetings, all expenses paid. For more normal park life, stroll upstream to the park in Buda, just to the north of the Margit Hid, to uncover men of all ages out for other men, no strings.

One of the very few gay saunas in Budapest and all of Hungary, Magnum (Csepregy u. 2) is small but clean with a youngish clientele restlessly roaming the recreational cabins between steamy sessions. But perhaps the only utterly unique aspect of the Budapest gay scene is the man-on-man action going down at the old Ottoman bath houses about town.

Unfortunately the atmospheric Rác Bath just over the Erzsébet Hid in Buda, is now shut and may not even be gay when it reopens in a year or two's time. Meantime, the Gellért Bath (Kelenhegyi út 4) - built in 1918 in art nouveau style - is probably the most famous among all public baths in Budapest, with outstanding architectural and manly beauty. Gay men mainly loll around inside, but the outside area is also cruised during summer, at which time the rooftop terrace of the Palatinus Strand complex on Margaret Island likewise transforms into a gay male nudist haven, taking on a life of its own.

# BUDAPEST

**ADRIAN GILLAN checks out Hungary's capital city**

